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Navy Secretary Finds Critics At Fault for Security Lapses

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 24 — Navy Secretary John F. Lehman Jr. acknowledged today that Navy internal security had grown lax, but he said Congress and journalists were to blame because they diverted Navy investigators' attention to minor fraud cases and demanded that the Navy focus on improving combat readiness.

In an interview, Mr. Lehman said that the reason the Naval Investigative Service had failed to uncover some recent security cases was that Navy investigators were busy responding to what he called public hysteria over reports of high-priced airplane toilet seats and ashtrays under purchasing contracts.

The Secretary also outlined measures the Navy had taken to tighten protection of its secrets and weapons. He said that some of them, especially those involving the Navy's supply system, would make troops wait longer for urgently needed parts and supplies.

Reviewing Security Record

Mr. Lehman took stock of his service's security record after months of setbacks, including a major espionage case that is still unfolding and allegations of sailors' diverting F-14 fighter plane components for sale to Iran. Last week the Pentagon added a new disclosure, reporting that the Soviet Union had used technology stolen from the Navy's new F-18 fighter plane to design advanced radar for its own aircraft.

Today the Secretary said the Navy had begun an accelerated effort to replace communications equipment involved in the espionage case. He estimated the effort would cost the service \$100 million over the next five years.

He said the Navy had begun a crack-down on the system for handling spare parts.

For example, he said that until re-

cently sailors on aircraft carriers were free to order parts worth up to \$10,000 directly from the contractors to keep airplanes ready to fly. He said sailors would now have to go through a central purchasing agency for any item worth more than \$1,000.

"I think that we were too loose, that we'd gone too far in chasing the god of readiness," Mr. Lehman said. "But that's what the country wanted, that's what the Congress wanted, that's what the press wanted."

In reaction, he said, "We've given them more bureaucrats to put aboard the ships and taken off some of the operational people to make room for the bureaucrats." He said a result would be a decline in the percentage of planes ready to take off from a carrier at any given time.

Senator Takes Issue

Senator Charles Grassley, Republican of Iowa, who has publicized some of the prices paid for spare parts, responded that Mr. Lehman's comments seemed to be an admission that Navy investigators chose their cases based on "public relations."

"He's still the Secretary of the Navy, and whether his investigators investigate waste or espionage is his decision," Mr. Grassley said. "If he has been distracted from it by the press, that's got to say something about his administrative ability."

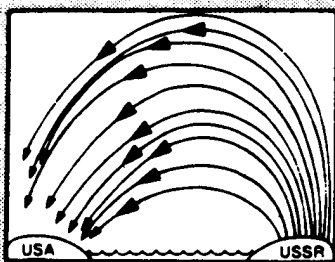
In the interview Mr. Lehman also said he had ordered the Naval Investigative Service to spend less time pursuing petty fraud cases and more to espionage and other major cases.

The Navy investigators were embarrassed when the Federal Bureau of Investigation said in April that it had uncovered a spy case that is alleged to

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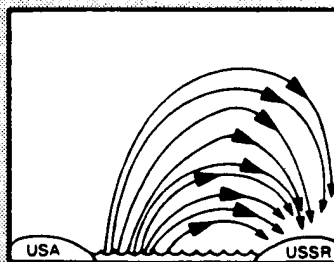
WITHOUT DEFENSIVE SHIELDS

Soviets attack U.S. ICBM silos with 5,000 warheads



If Soviets destroy almost all 2,800 ICBM warheads...

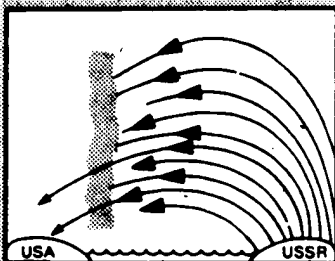
...and U.S. retaliates.



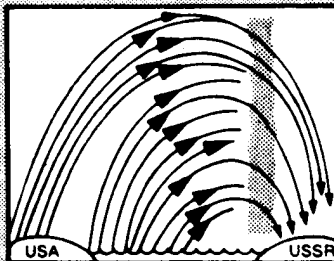
...U.S. then fires 4,500 submarine-launched warheads at targets in U.S.S.R.

WITH DEFENSIVE SHIELDS

Each side can block 4,000 warheads



If 2,240 U. S. warheads survive...



...then 6,740 U.S. warheads can be launched at U.S.S.R., but only 2,740 reach targets

Source: Office of Technology Assessment

have operated undetected for nearly 20 years within the Navy, and when the Customs Service reported that sailors based in Southern California had operated a theft ring for five years.

The Secretary said the Naval Investigative Service "was a victim of Congressional and press hysteria over some of the trendier headline issues."

Mr. Lehman said the recent cases had convinced him that the Navy had granted security clearances too freely, had become careless in handling docu-

ments and had not modernized its security measures to keep up with the era of computers and satellites that "vastly increased traffic in classified communications."

He said that in response the Navy has cut its security clearances by more than one-fourth, and expects to cut them by half. He said the service has ordered that fewer copies of instruction and repair manuals for sensitive weapons be printed and has undertaken random searches and polygraph tests.